

Testimony of Bill Turner
Chairman, Siskiyou County Resource Advisory Committee
Yreka, California

Before the

Committee on Agriculture
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC

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Good Morning, my name is Bill Turner. I am from Siskiyou County, CA at the northern border of the state. I am the Timber Procurement Manager for Timber Products Company in Yreka, CA. One of my other part time duties has brought me before you today. I serve as the Chairman of Siskiyou Counties Resource Advisory Committee (RAC). Thank you for giving me the opportunity to address you this morning regarding Public Law 106-393 (The Secure Rural Schools and Community Self Determination Act of 2000), specifically, how the Title II funds are allocated and used and their benefits.

As a result of this legislation, in 2005 Siskiyou County as a whole will receive \$9,270,799 of which \$695,310 has been allocated to Title II or RAC projects. Siskiyou County is a large and sprawling county that encompasses more than 4,000,000 acres, of which more than 2,500,000 acres is managed by agencies of the Federal government such as the Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, and Fish and Wildlife Service. Communities such as McCloud, Seiad Valley, Fort Jones and Happy Camp may be unknown to most of you here, but they are all communities that have been economically and socially devastated by the drastic reductions in timber management policies and the resulting job losses that occurred.

It is not my intent to dwell on the divisions, but rather on what I see as the beginning of overcoming some of the acrimony and hard feelings that have resulted from these sudden changes.

Upon passage of Public Law 106-393, Siskiyou Counties Board of Supervisors set out to form a RAC. I have to tell you that at the first meeting there was some apprehension over whether such a diverse set of people (leaders of environmental groups, a union representative, tribal representatives, timber and ranching interests, elected officials and others) would ever agree on anything, let alone projects that may benefit our communities. However, I am here to tell you

that this group has coalesced and there have been some interesting results, some quite unexpected.

- Lines of communication have been opened between the environmental groups, timber industry, ranchers and the Forest Service that never existed before. Barriers have been broken down and trust has started to develop as participants have worked toward common goals.
- Projects that encourage collaboration have gone through that not only have given people real jobs in economically depressed areas, but also brought the communities a needed lift in spirit and pride.
- We have been able to leverage the RAC funds to get other grants and funding from a wide range of sources such as California Department of Transportation, California Department of Fish and Game, the Karuk Indian Tribe, and Community Development Block Grants and more, resulting in over 70 projects spread across the county. Projects as diverse as tree thinning, trail maintenance, riparian area restoration, fire hazard reduction, noxious weed eradication, trail maintenance, and others

Let me give you a specific example of what I see as a success resulting from this legislation.

Happy Camp, California is a remote rural community surrounded by the dense forests of the Klamath National Forest. In 1994 the last sawmill in town closed. This was a tremendous economic blow to the area. In Happy Camp more than 70% of the people receive some form of public assistance. The Happy Camp Fire Safe Council put together a proposal seeking RAC funding to equip and man a 5 person crew that would do fuel reduction work around the community. The work they began is very visible and has encouraged other landowners to participate in fuel clearing activities beyond the scope of the original project. Subsequently, this crew has not only done work in Happy Camp, but they have been hired to do similar projects in other areas of the county. This crew has been working steadily now for more than a year and a half.

This is one small example of a project that has helped one of the communities in my county. Other projects are going on simultaneously all around our county, state, region, and nation.

Currently our RAC is in the process of reviewing and discussing what we consider a more "large scale" project. We are considering implementation of some plans that will have a larger impact and treat a broader area.

The existence of the RAC and the process surrounding the project proposals and approvals has generated a focal point to bring forest health concerns and restoration forward. The effected communities are seeing positive physical results as well as actually seeing some jobs created. In some cases usable merchantable material is being removed and used from the forest.

I would strongly urge you to reauthorize Public Law 106-393. If this Law is not reauthorized, it will be taking a giant step backwards away from the recovery environmentally, socially, and economically that we are just now beginning to feel is possible. It is critical to keep the momentum going that has been started.

I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have.

Respectfully Submitted,

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